

Language Arts Writing Lessons/Prompts

Introduction

Along with listening, reading, and speaking, writing is one of the four basic communication strands in any language arts curriculum. Unfortunately, writing often receives much less attention than other communication modes, especially reading. Frequent calls for improvement in student literacy are often directed exclusively at reading instruction or at reading test scores, to the exclusion of writing. In truth, however, reading and writing are reciprocal; improvements in student writing will lead to improved reading skills, and vice versa. Yet, in many Utah classrooms, a high percentage of language arts instructional time still focuses the student only on the improvement of reading, with writing often relegated to journal entries, content area reports, or assigned “creative writing.” And, in too many classrooms, formal writing instruction is either infrequent or nonexistent.

At least part of this neglect can be attributed to student class loads and the enormous responsibility teachers feel to “correct” student papers. A second factor is the complex nature of writing instruction, as well as the necessary demands of one-to-one conferencing and individualized instruction. Last, but certainly not least, is the level of confidence teachers possess in teaching writing effectively. There is no real shortcut in the teaching of writing. Writing teachers must be informed decision makers; they must know good writing from bad, and the specific traits/attributes affecting the quality of the writing. Teachers must possess the ability to coach, coax, and sometimes cajole the best writing from their students. Like teachers of reading who like to read and see themselves as readers, teachers of writing must not neglect this skill in their own lives; they too must write and view themselves as writers.

The lesson plans and writing prompts that follow were produced to assist teachers in their role as teachers of writing. Together, they should not be considered a writing program, complete or incomplete, but simply a tool to assist in the instruction and assessment of students in the most informal of settings, the classroom. You will find on the following pages a complete Six Traits analytical scoring guide; lesson plans and writing prompts for each grade level, kindergarten through sixth grade; sample student papers from each writing lesson; and an assessment and analysis of each paper based upon the Six Traits model, with teacher commentary.

Six Traits Writing Assessment Model

The Six Traits Writing Assessment Model included here is generic to all modes of writing. Developed by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, this assessment model is based on a five-point scale, with five being the highest and one the lowest. Descriptors accompany score points one, three, and five only. Papers falling between descriptors one and three or descriptors three and five receive score points of two and four, respectively. Student papers are assessed on separate writing traits: ideas and content, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, and conventions. Teachers not familiar with the Six Traits model should read

the descriptors carefully and practice assessing papers, or enroll in a Six Traits writing in-service, if possible. Student papers at the primary grade levels (K-2) are not assessed using this model. The sample papers for K-2 lessons shown here include the teacher commentary only.

Lesson Plans and Writing Prompts

At least one lesson plan and prompt are available for each grade level. For some grades, two or more are available. Each lesson and prompt has been field-tested with several groups of students. Most of the writing prompts require students to produce a narrative or descriptive response. Future lessons will be correlated to content areas such as social studies, mathematics, and science, and require students to produce more expository responses. Although each step in the writing process is not explicitly specified in each lesson plan, the complete writing process is implied. Pre-writing activities and experiences are an integral part of each lesson. Time to adequately draft, rewrite, and edit are essential to producing a writer's best work. Embed these assessments as a natural part of your writing program. Do not announce them as tests or assessments. Take whatever time is needed to obtain the best results. Adapt. Modify. Change the lesson plans, if you choose, to make them your own and to make them work best for your students. Remember, you are attempting to find out what students **can** do, not just what they need to learn.

Sample Student Papers

Sample student papers are shown for each lesson and prompt. In most cases, a high-end paper and an average or low-end paper are represented. In other cases, student papers are not labeled as either. In point of fact, all student sample papers should be viewed as just that—samples—drawn from students who participated in the field tests. The high-end papers are not perfect, nor are they models of what students **should** produce. Use the sample papers to gain an understanding of what students can and do produce under the conditions specified in the lessons. Teach and re-teach. Get students to stretch their abilities. Work hard to produce better samples and models from your own students.

Teacher Commentaries

Following each student sample is a teacher commentary. In grades three through six, the commentary is accompanied by the Six Traits score received by the student on each of the traits. Of more interest is the annotation (or comment) by the teacher attached to each score point. Although the commentaries are by necessity short, they give some insight into what teachers might say to students in a writing conference. In grades K-2, no trait scores are assigned because the text generated at these grade levels tends to be limited. Only the teacher commentary is given. For prompts requiring an expository response, only three traits were scored—content and ideas, organization, and conventions.

A Word About the Lessons and Prompts

The lessons, writing prompts, student samples, and commentaries on the website www.usoe.org were written and developed by a team of teachers representing various

Utah districts. Members of the team field-tested all lessons and prompts with their own students, and made revisions and adjustments prior to publication. Utah teachers have permission to copy and use all lessons on this website for their students. Ownership of the materials resides with the Utah State Office of Education.

The Six Traits of Writing Within the Writing Process of Instruction

Writing, Standard 8 of the Utah Elementary Language Arts Core Curriculum, is organized around the Writing Process. The writing process is defined as pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing/presenting. During the pre-writing stage, the writer thinks about his or her purpose for writing, gathers information, chooses a form for writing (letter, report, etc), makes a plan, and decides who will be the audience. The drafting stage of the Writing Process is the first attempt by the writer to get ideas down on paper. The writer creates a number of drafts within this stage. Revising is where the writer attempts to change the final draft in order to improve the writing. The writer may choose to add, cut, or change an idea during the revising stage. Editing is the next stage of the Writing Process. During the editing stage, the writer does a final edit and proofreading of their writing. Editing is a very careful word-by-word, line-by-line checking of the writing in order to correct any errors. During the publishing/presenting stage of the Writing Process, the writer might publish his or her writing by placing the writing in a notebook, hanging it on a classroom wall, or placing it in a class book. The writer may also present by simply reading their writing to a classroom buddy.

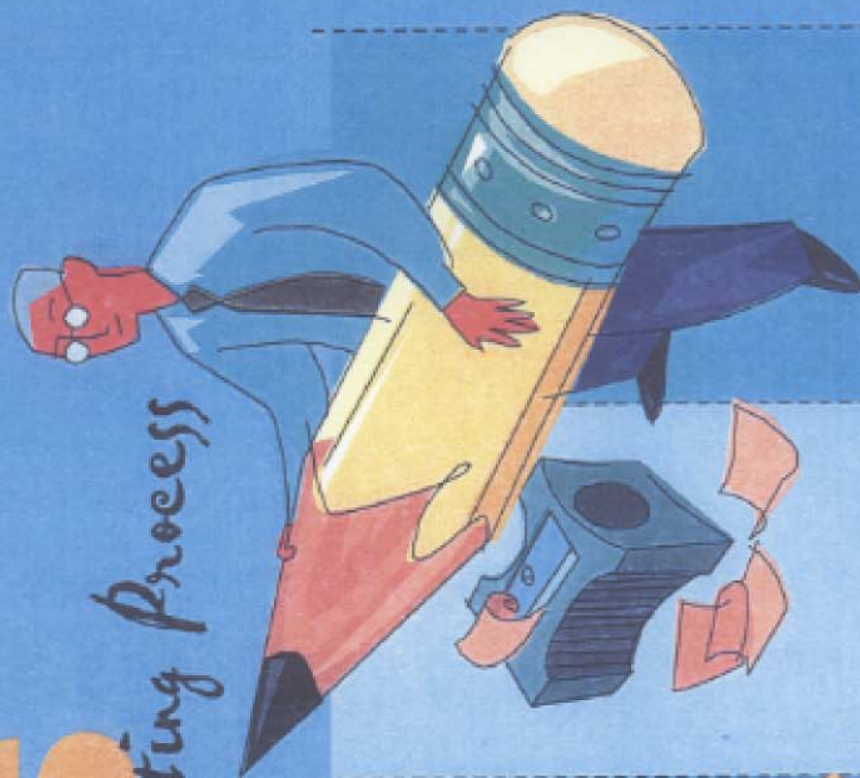
The Six Traits of writing are embedded within the Writing Process. The trait of generating ideas occurs within the pre-writing stage. The trait of organization is addressed during the pre-writing stage and the drafting stage of the Writing Process. The trait of voice is addressed during the drafting stage of writing. During the revising stage, the writer works to achieve sentence fluency and appropriate word choice. The editing stage is where close attention is paid to the conventions of writing.

As a writer becomes more experienced with the Six Traits of writing, he or she may choose to address the Six Traits within the Writing Process in a more individual way. The writer may choose to look at conventions in both the revising and editing stage of their writing. They may also choose to think about voice in the pre-writing stage, as well as the drafting stage.

Shown on the next page is a graphic that illustrates the general process of addressing the Six Traits within the Writing Process. Certainly, the classroom teacher, as he/she delivers writing instruction and reviews students' writing, would want to be aware of the Writing Process and how the Six Traits are nested within this process.

6 TRAITS

Within the Writing Process



1. IDEAS

2. ORGANIZATION

3. VOICE

4. SENTENCE
FLUENCY

5. WORD
CHOICE

6. CONVENTIONS

Pre-writing

Drafting

Revising

Editing

*Publishing/
Presenting*